

Teachers Implementing an Educational Policy and Implications for Pupils' (Especially Girls') Access, Performance and Retention

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Abstract

Based on a socio-cultural perspective on educational policy as practice, this study used interviews, classroom observations and document analysis to investigate the case of four teachers' implementing an educational policy and implications of their practices for first and second grade students' access to, performance and retention in school, especially girls. Results revealed that a) teachers interacted mainly with the pedagogical and the content knowledge; b) the classroom atmosphere was more collaborative and "student-centered"; c) teachers facilitated knowledge building from students' experiences; d) students became relaxed, inquisitive and responsible for their learning; e) girls participated in the classroom more often than boys while the repeater-rate was almost non-existent; and f) female parents and illiterate mothers became involved in their children's learning process (e.g. helping in homework, visiting school to inquire about their children's work). It is concluded that the teachers' interaction with the policy had positive implications for pupils' (mainly girls') learning.

Introduction

The necessity of an education reform aiming at designing a national language policy in Niger was felt a decade after the country's independence in 1960 with the creation of the Commission Nationale pour la Reforme de l'Education (CNRE) [National Commission for Education Reform] in 1972. After its first meeting in February 1974, the CNRE recommended the inclusion of national languages in education. In May 1978 their second and last meeting adopted a policy project for bilingual education, using French and national languages in school.

Inspired by these recommendations and the positive trends that the 1973 UNESCO pilot study on the use of Hausa (i.e. the primary language in Niger with 57% native and over 80% total speakers) as the medium of instruction in primary school in the city of Zinder had shown (Alidou, 1997; Herbert, et al., 1999), the then Niger military regime created experimental bilingual schools across the country in 1979. Five national languages (Hausa, Zarma, Kanuri, Fulfulde and Tamasheq) were used as media of instruction alongside French in these schools. Already in 1974, the military ruler had declared that Niger schools needed to be "socially integrated and economically available" (Herbert, et

al., 1999, p. 16). However, the newly-created schools remained experimental in spite of the popular outcry for reforming the whole educational system and the official resolutions taken at the 1990-1991 national conference for seeing this happen.

It was not until June 1, 1998 that a presidential decree put into law an education reform policy known as LOSEN (French acronym for *Loi d'Orientation du Système Educatif Nigérien* [Niger Education System Reform Law]). The 1998 reform law highlights two major points: a) the inclusion of national languages as media of instruction in primary schools (Articles 10 and 19) and b) the change in the primary school curriculum and, to some extent, the pedagogical practices that were used in the classrooms to reflect the socio-cultural realities of learners' immediate environment (Article 15).

This paper exposes the results of a case study of four teachers implementing this learner-sociocultural-reality-based national curriculum as mandated in the national reform law document and the implications of their practice for pupil access, performance and retention. The paper pays special attention to implications for girls since the reform policy and its accompanying documents aim specifically to:

- a) Identify and eradicate "hurdles to socio economic and cultural development, pedagogical shortcomings and other obstacles to the development of full potential of girls and women in the learning process" (LOSEN, Article 14); and
- b) Increase girls' access to school by raising the rate of school attendance to 52 % from 28.9 % in 2002 (MEBA, 2003) by 2015.

The paper answers the following research questions:

- 1) What policy content do teachers respond to during their interaction with the reform law document?
- 2) How do bilingual schoolteachers interact with the education reform policy?
- 3) How do the various teacher responses to policy manifest themselves in pedagogical practices?
- 4) How do resulting pedagogical practices manifest themselves in students' (particularly girls') learning?

Investigating and developing knowledge on teachers' reaction to educational policy, especially in the context of Niger where this study is the first on these bilingual school teachers, can: (a) help policy makers value teachers participation in the policy process rather than 'dropping' them sets of laws and regulations from above to apply to their teaching practices; and (b) Inform teacher trainers as to how to address content of teacher training workshops for improving teaching practices as a whole since teachers constitute the cornerstone of any educational reform effectiveness.

First, the paper consists of a presentation of the conceptual framework that informed the study followed by a literature review highlighting the existing knowledge on teachers' various responses to policy, curricula and pedagogical innovations. Next, are the methodological and analysis of findings sections. We have analyzed the findings following each of our research questions, and ended the discussion with results that appeared as by-products of the study but are important as implications of the teachers'

practices while interacting with the policy.

Before proceeding, we need to acknowledge that, throughout the paper we have loosely used 'interaction', 'response', 'reaction' and their verbal counterparts 'interact', 'respond', and 'react' interchangeably in speaking of the four teachers and the reform policy. Also, we have sometimes used 'reform based national curriculum' to refer to the 'bilingual education policy' under study throughout this report.

Researching Policy as Practice: A Conceptual Framework

The 1998 national reform policy in Niger, like any other policy in social fields, constitutes a linear model of educational policy. It, therefore, "assumes that policy processes begin with problem identification, then moves through stages of policy formation and adoption, which is followed by implementation and ultimately by evaluation" (Porter & Hicks, 1995 cited in Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 5). As such, it pushes the less powerful education stakeholders such as parents, students and teachers back to a second-class status. It expects, for example, for teachers to adjust their pedagogical practices to fit the new rules that were handed over to them (Levinson & Sutton, 2001). Furthermore, other models see the relationship between policy and practice as one in which the former is "an instrument of governance [full of power] and the latter is classroom instruction [devoid of any power] or 'political resistance' " (Wells & Serna, 1996 cited in Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 5).

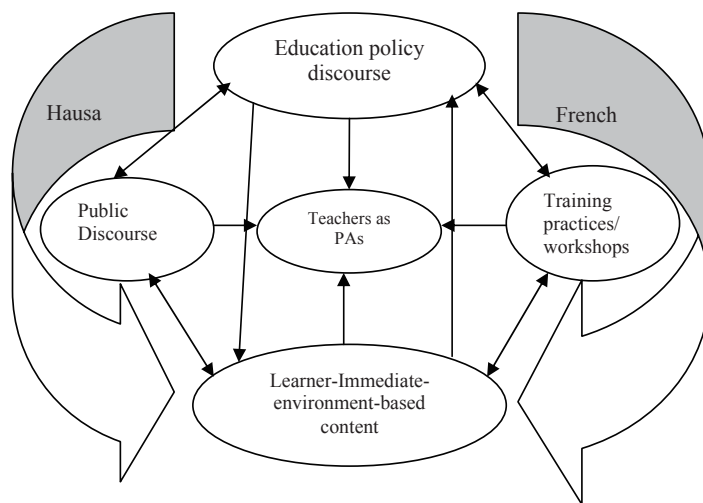
From these two perspectives, research on policy and practice only focuses on how the 'powerless' actors such as teachers "do or do not implement state policy, [and] the way that they act upon what has been given to them from above" (Street, 2001, p. 148). This case study challenges this 'linear' perspective of educational policy research in that it puts the teachers and the students at the center of investigation. In so doing, it uses what Sutton & Levinson (2001) described as the 'socio-cultural perspective on educational policy as practice' as its ideological/ epistemological approach.

According to Levinson & Sutton (2001), the socio-cultural perspective on the educational policy as practice is "a locally informed, comparatively astute, ethnographically rich account of how people make, interpret, and otherwise engage with the policy process" (p. 4). It is particularly relevant to this study in that it is concerned with the social approach to cultural practices in education and investigates the interaction of the powerless and silenced actors of the educational reform such as teachers with the policy itself. It is important to document how the four teachers in this study "interpret and [...] engage with" the educational policy since teacher participation in any policy process and, specifically in the policy implementation phase, is very crucial to any educational reform (Mantilla, 2001).

The following figure illustrates my representation of the socio-cultural perspective on the educational policy as practice which guides this case study. In essence, it is a depiction of our (the researchers') perspective on how teachers as key actors (put in the

center here) interact with the policy-based knowledge that they received from teacher training practices during the policy implementation curricular workshops. The expression ‘policy-based knowledge’ does not refer uniquely to the subject matter and pedagogy knowledge from the Hausa endogenous practices of the immediate milieu of the pupils (Hausa was the medium of instruction in the studied schools). It also includes the western type of knowledge that teachers had received from pre-service training practices and policy-based workshops, which took place in the French language.

Figure 1: Our Representation of the Socio-Cultural Perspective on Educational Policy in the context of this study (PAs stands for policy appropriators) (adapted from Chekaraou 2009, p. 61).



Although we are aware that teachers may have various responses vis-à-vis the education policy under study, to respect the spirit of the socio-cultural perspective on policy as practice, we put teachers as policy appropriators at the center of the model. This does not in any way mean that appropriation is the only response to policy discourse that we expect teachers to have. The participant teachers possessing each his/her own personality, natural predispositions and background knowledge as a teacher, diverse responses as reported below in the literature review, may emerge. As researchers, we remain open to such prospect.

Interaction with the Policy and Implications

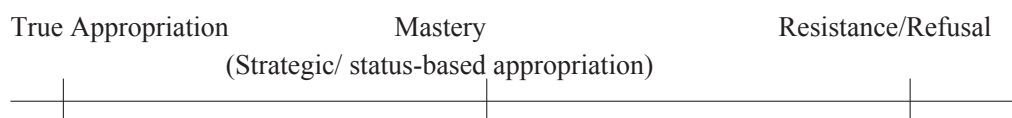
Research has suggested many ways through which teachers could interact with policy. For example, Sutton & Levinson (2001) saw appropriation of educational policy by lower ranking stakeholders such as teachers as the expected outcome of the interaction of teachers with policy at its implementation level. Appropriation, they argued, “highlights

the way creative agents ‘take in’ elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive and institutional resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation and action.” They summarize the definition to contend that, “[a]ppropriation is a kind of taking policy and making it one’s own” (p. 3). Levinson & Sutton further argued that, “[e]ven outright resistance to a policy can be conceived as a kind of appropriation insofar as it incorporates a negative image of policy into schemes of action” (p. 3).

In addition, in their study on whether pedagogical ideals were embraced or imposed in Guinea’s language arts and reading classrooms, Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi (2001) found many ways in which stakeholders responded to these ideals. Warning against the likelihood of confusing appropriation with mastery in that mastering “a tool or an idea is to know how to use it [while to appropriate means] to make someone else’s tool or idea one’s own [and that] one can master an idea without appropriating it” (p. 37), Anderson-Levitt and Alimasi’s (2001) findings suggested various ways through which the Guineans might have embraced pedagogical ideals in schools: a) true appropriation (i.e. making an idea or tool one’s own); b) mastery (i.e. know how to use an idea or a tool); c) strategic appropriation (i.e. mastery for the sake maximizing loans and grants from different donors; d) status-based appropriation (i.e. mastery for the sake of appealing to the status that these ideals offered; e) adoption (i.e. embracing the ideals “as is” without deep conviction or expertise, simply wanting to appear as experts by borrowing “buzzwords” to apply in their context and d) resistance (i.e. outright refusal to master or adopt).

Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi (2001) summarized their findings regarding responses to pedagogical ideas in Guinea on a continuum consisting of three main types of responses. True appropriation remained on the left foremost end and resistance, i.e. simple refusal, on the right. Between the two would lie closer to true appropriation, mastery, which took into account the strategic and status-based appropriation as well as adoption without any conviction to appear as experts of western knowledge even if it was simply for the sake of status. Figure 2 provides a summary.

Figure 2: True Appropriation, Mastery, and Resistance Continuum (Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi, 2001, adapted from Chekaraou, 2009, p. 63).



Alongside with the previously discussed studies, Murtadha-Watts (2001) reported on a study in which multiple layers of policy were analyzed to raise questions on the negotiated terrain of curriculum policy formation as district level decisions were made and accountability measures put in place. Two female African-American education leaders asserted that “resistance to normative processes in schools” was the only way to

provide children in city schools with meaningful education. These leaders became socially critical in that they spoke and acted across and around established racist and inequitable educational systems to “push for policies that could be used for creating greater equity in schools” (p.119).

Murtadha-Watts’ (2001) contention that resistance on the part of educational leaders helped provide students with better learning opportunities than they would have otherwise received, echoed Levinson & Sutton’s (2001) suggestion that resistance could be seen as part of the process of appropriation since it could allow the resisting actors to think of and apply alternative ways in their day-to-day practice.

Along with Murtadha-Watts, in a study on a seven-year old project (NEU) that aimed at improving quality in education in Guatemala through “an active teaching-learning process, [...] and appropriate curriculum to meet the rural needs” (p.127), Mantilla (2001) discovered that teachers in her study not only participated actively in designing the curriculum but they were also depended upon in the endeavor. The teachers appropriated the reform to improve their day-to-day pedagogical practices and interaction with the students in that they: a) Innovated new methods of grading students so that no student failed; b) Developed “cognitive self-awareness”, i.e. they established cohesiveness and group solidarity due to what they called teachers’ circles where they would meet, discuss and critique their practices together; c) Identified with the new system by referring to it as “our”; d) Worked for “social integration”, i.e. they worked together with students, community, parent, donor agencies to make decisions about the education reform; and e) Preserved their “territory” (i.e. innovations that they initiated) through accepting an open “tension” with policy makers who supported the old system.

An example of the new methods the teachers initiated was a flexible promotion system according to which a child who did not finish a given instructional unit for advancement to the next grade would be allowed and encouraged to return the following year until completion of that unit when s/he would then move to the next grade. The system benefited children because it allowed them to move forward at their own speed. Policy appropriation by teachers in Guatemala’s NEU resulted in expanding the NEU project. Mantilla suggested that this type of appropriation provided teachers with feelings of personal growth, change and satisfaction. It also contributed to emergence of better teaching practices, which were conducive of better learning for learners. For instance, teachers moved from “lecturer” to “facilitator” in the classroom.

To sum up, many ways of interacting with policy or pedagogical ideals emerged from existing studies including appropriation, adoption, mastery and resistance. Of the various responses, appropriation seems to lead to better teaching practices and subsequently provide better opportunities for learning. Mantilla (2001) brought about another aspect of teacher responses vis-à-vis policy: identification with policy so as to refer to everything as “our”. Teachers had a sense of “ownership” (Fullan, et al., 2005) of this public good that was the policy they interacted with. Following this literature review, one needs to wonder how the four teachers in our study respond to the reform

based national curriculum in Niger. What implications can be drawn from these teachers' practices for those whom the policy is supposed to benefit, i.e. the learners?

Methodology

Sites and Sampling

The study was carried out in two schools where Hausa was the medium of instruction, one in an urban center and the other in a rural town. Choosing schools in an urban and a rural area would give us a good source of data comparison. The urban school was located in the capital city, a cosmopolitan area where various cultures intermingled even though Hausa was used in the school while the second school which was located in a rural town next to a provincial city, offered the likelihood of collecting data from a school that was surrounded by typically rural socio-cultural practices. The difference in the location of the two schools may be reflected in the classroom teaching practices under study since the curriculum and the pedagogy were pegged into the socio-cultural practices of the immediate milieu of the pupils.

The teachers (N=4) were selected through purposive sampling. Every school had its own assigned teachers for the year to such an extent that selecting a given school for research also meant opting for its teachers as participants. Following this arrangement, a primary school teacher would be assigned to a classroom for the whole year. Therefore, having selected four teachers as participants, we had no choice other than doing observations in the four classrooms in which they taught.

Although this study was a case of four teachers in their classrooms, the choice of the socio-cultural model of analyzing policy as practice (i.e. aiming at capturing a holistic picture of the teacher interaction with the policy) required that we also heard from all other school stakeholders including: Head teachers (N=2, one of whom was Teacher-Participant 3), ministry officials (N=2), students (N=20), elementary school teachers' union representatives (N=2), executive members of the national teachers' union (N=2), parents (N=13), 1 regional school inspector, 3 officials of the German project (GTZ) in charge of funding and following-up the policy implementation, representatives of the French project for advancement of education in Niger (ADEN) (N=2), and curriculum planners and teacher trainers from the ministry office in charge of pedagogical practices, textbooks and the promotion of national languages, who were also teaching material writers (N=3).

Data Collection

Data was collected from interview, classroom observations and document analysis. The ten-to-fifteen-minute-per-participant interviews were semi-structured, i.e. centered on key guiding questions. Seven out of ten parent participants were unexpectedly female and

legal guardians. In Niger, one would expect fathers to respond to calls from their children's school administration. Regarding the classroom *observations* we spent two weeks in every classroom from 8:00am to 12:00noon and 3:00 to 6:00pm. We also observed out-of-classroom practices such as the manual activities (e.g. pottery with clay), physical education tasks and free-time play among pupils. *Document analysis* consisted of reading students' classroom records as well as policy and related documents.

During both interviews and observations, but much more so during observations, we took notes by placing a vertical solid line on each page of our notebooks with the inscription "Descriptive notes" (raw data as is) on the top left side and "Reflective notes" (interpretive notes serving as simultaneous data analysis). We audio recorded data to ensure accuracy.

Results and interpretation

Question 1: What policy content do teachers respond to during their interaction with the policy?

Table 2: Two Types of knowledge for teacher interaction (adapted from Chekaraou, 2009, p. 183)

Pedagogical Knowledge	Content Knowledge
Teaching methods and approaches teachers used:	Use of endogenous knowledge:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active Method; ▪ Lesson plans; ▪ Thematic Approach; ▪ Goal-oriented pedagogy; ▪ Global method (Whole Language method). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Themes of study; ▪ Knowledge from field trips and inquiry homework questions; ▪ Games and Folktales; ▪ Materials of teaching from local environment; ▪ Ethics – politeness and respect for elders; ▪ Self as a role model.

Table 2 reveals two types of knowledge that emerged as the policy content with which the teachers interacted. My interviews with policy makers and implementers revealed that they merely expected teachers to adapt their teaching to the content and pedagogical knowledge. These results take us to our next research question.

Question 2: How do bilingual schoolteachers interact with the education reform policy?

All four teachers involved in the study adapted the pedagogical and content knowledge although to a higher degree the latter in the case of Teacher-Participant 4. However, this adaptation varied in degrees. Thus, adaptation, which denoted an ability

to understand, apply and adjust to theoretical principles, thus, involving application and adjustment, revealed itself as an umbrella term, which could involve three levels: a) Adoption (Teacher-Participant 4), the lowest level of adaptation denoting a mindless application of rules; b) Mastery (Teacher-Participants 1 and 2), the mid level of adaptation involving a deeper level of understanding of theory and its application in such a way that the master was able to generate strategies through acquired theory even without supervision; and c) Appropriation (Teacher-Participants 1, 2 and 3), the high level of adaptation denoting a deeper understanding of theory crossing over into commitment, belief, motivation and resonance with deeply felt conviction, which reaches a level of identification with the theory, thus making it one's own.

The latter qualities of a teacher (i.e. commitment, motivation and resonance with deeply felt conviction reaching to identification with the theory) concerned mainly Teacher-Participant 3 (TP-3), whose interaction with the policy put him a degree higher in appropriation than Teacher-Participants 1 and 2. We called him a natural appropriator. Natural appropriation resulted from the interplay between the prior professional skills of this teacher, i.e. the pedagogical knowledge he brought with him to the workshops, his natural predispositions, level of alertness and his eagerness for learning new knowledge taught in workshops.

The advent of this concept of natural appropriation brought out yet the concept of 'pedagogical-content knowledge'. For Schulman (1987), pedagogical-content knowledge is "that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding" (p. 8). TP-3 was that special teacher who knew how to skillfully combine content and pedagogy knowledge in his classroom. As a result, he qualified, in our view, as the owner of pedagogical-content knowledge.

Teacher educators agree with Schulman (1987) that the ultimate goal of any teacher education and training should be the mastery of the pedagogical-content knowledge by teachers. TP-3 revealed himself not simply as a master of this type of knowledge but its appropriator. He revealed himself to be an accomplished and efficient teacher. Because this teacher emerged as a natural appropriator and consequently the sole owner of pedagogical-content knowledge, we conclude that appropriation is the potentially natural outcome of policy even though it was part of adaptation: The higher the level of appropriation of policy by a teacher, the more likely his success as a teacher, as exemplified by TP-3. Therefore, this study supports our putting appropriation at the center of our representation of the socio-cultural perspective of policy as practice.

Question 3: How do various responses to policy manifest themselves in pedagogical practices?

Implications for Teacher/ Student Roles and Classroom Climate

Table 3: Teacher/ student roles and classroom climate in bilingual schools (adapted from Chekaraou, 2009, pp.158-9)

Teacher is a ...	Student is ...	Classroom is ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guide: A guide who would follow students' every step in the learning process. His/her only job: Probing questions so as to lead students to discover what was intended for them to learn; ▪ Classroom power sharer; ▪ Comfortable person in the class. Not omniscient. Students also participate in building knowledge; ▪ Care giver. Encourager to the inattentive and shy to be expressive and share accounts of their experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsible for and main actors in their learning; ▪ Full of sense of responsibility and alert; owner of quick thinking skills; ▪ Center of focus in the classroom; ▪ Free to participate, express themselves, and bring own experience and knowledge in the classroom; ▪ Relaxed. Not intimidated; ▪ A sharer. Eager to share own knowledge with class; ▪ Inquisitive Encouraged asking questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Democratic as opposed to "dictatorial," Teacher shares power in the classroom with the students. He does not impose them anything; ▪ Relaxed and friendly; ▪ Busy due to every student wanting to give his/her point of view; ▪ Reflective of multiple perspectives on everyday life due to number of shared experiences; ▪ Sharing makes class collaboration-oriented especially during tasks given by teacher.

For anybody who knew about the "dictatorial" role of the teacher in the Niger French-only classroom (Moumouni, 1994) as the only person who detained knowledge and had the capacity of distributing it, Table 3 exhibits a big revolution. Teachers used teaching techniques that allowed their roles and those of the students to be conducive to better teaching/ learning practices, teacher attitudes and inquisitiveness from the learners (Table 3). Furthermore, learning in such a relaxed, collaborative and democratic atmosphere enabled students to contribute to their own knowledge build-up. For example, what teachers referred to as the "inquiry technique". Students would be assigned some questions related to the *Langage lesson* (i.e. language art conversation around a given theme) of the day. They took these questions home and responded to them with the help of their parents or family members. The various students' responses would be examined and discussed in class during the next session. The technique served as a bridge between the students' learning in the classroom and their lives in their home and community. This approach made learners be responsible for and the main actors in their learning. Thus, learners, parents and the community contributed to the subject matter learned in school. Because of the inquiry technique, learning in bilingual schools, became, therefore, learning as inquiry.

In addition, the Active Method, as the pedagogical approach used in these schools, showed a high correlation between the use of Hausa as a medium of instruction and students' freedom to express themselves without feeling intimidated. As the language of classroom interaction, this native language impacted the teacher-student relationship in a way that positively affected classroom behaviors. For instance, fourth and fifth grade teachers in School A, who were former French monolingual schools teachers believed that bilingual students were impolite compared to the monolingual students that they had taught before. Upon asking my participants whether they believed so, all disagreed, arguing that one should expect students whose native language was being used as the medium of instruction not to feel intimidated by the presence of a teacher in the classroom. Teachers who were not cognizant of this fact might see this as disrespect for their authority and rank as the only owner of knowledge.

One teacher echoed this view in a more detailed way in the following statement:

It is not indiscipline. In bilingual schools, the children do not feel blocked or intimidated. The teacher is not authoritative, acting like a dictator who imposes everything on the students while they [the students] are not given time to express themselves freely. No [we make use of] the teaching method consisting of letting the students express themselves freely, go do something practical and receive all the necessary means to explore what is in their immediate environment without imposition. In the bilingual classroom, the teacher guides the students. As a result, children are inquisitive, open-minded and have time and freedom to communicate with and ask clarification questions of their teacher. It is not like in traditional French monolingual schools in which it is the teacher who monopolizes knowledge while children remain inactive, as consumers only (Chekaraou, 2009, p. 162).

This quote implied that teachers should not mistake the free teacher-student interaction that encouraged students' expressiveness in bilingual schools for indiscipline. Rather, it reflected the positive outcomes of learning coming from the use students' native language. Students no longer felt as intimidated as students in the French monolingual schools where an expressive and inquisitive child would be seen as lacking discipline.

Furthermore, this teacher meant that the use of a foreign language (i.e. French), which was unknown to children until they enrolled in school to teach them, intimidated them by putting the teacher in a position of being the only knowledgeable and, thus, powerful person in the classroom. Children would bring their background knowledge to the classroom, but due to their not knowing the language of instruction, they would feel powerless and intimidated. Freire's argument (Semali and Kencheloe, 1999) that the use of children's native language in an Active Method approach guarantees their success in learning, supports my participants' making connection between native language instruction and the proactiveness of the bilingual students in the classroom and their feel-

free-to-express-themselves attitude towards their teachers. They were not afraid to ask questions because they posed these in a language that they knew and spoke with their parents.

Given the Niger social norms that encourage a child, especially a girl child, to “shut it up” when adults were speaking, the use of the Active Method in these classrooms might have encouraged the children in the study to learn better. The active teaching approach provided students with a better learning environment. Above all, this “free” learning environment, in turn, enabled learners to express themselves freely without any fear of reprimand, thus, the positive impact of this method on the learning environment.

Question 4: How do resulting pedagogical practices manifest themselves in students’ (girls’) learning?

Table 4: Classroom interaction of girls versus boys (1)

Lessons (Langage)	# of utterances	Teacher utterances	Group utterances	Boys’ utterances	Girls’ utterances	Not Specified
#1	128	57	33	14	18	6
#2:	191	88	40	26	30	7
Total	319	145	73	40	48	13
First to speak during lesson introduction & when T asks new questions	18	NA	NA	7	8	2

This table highlights the following points:

- Girls tended to be as active as or more active than boys (18 utterances versus 14 for boys in the first lesson while 30 utterances versus 26 for boys with a total of 48 utterances for girls and 40 for boys);
- Girls almost always started speaking when teacher introduced a lesson or concept and asks questions; and
- All teachers agree that girls are more active than boys during the interviews.

Table 5 (A & B): Impact of policy on girls’ retention & achievement (passing from grade 1 to grade 2)

A: Urban, Passage from grade 1 to grade 2			B: Rural, Passage from grade 1 to grade 2		
N= 27	Boys = 16	Girls = 11	N= 42	Boys = 25	Girls = 17
Av. grade/10	5.73	6.4	Av. grade/10	6.46	6.05
≥ 5.0	12 = 75%	8 = 72.7%	≥ 5.0	16 = 64%	13 = 76.47%
≥ 2.0 (pass)	13 = 81.25%	9 = 81.8%	≥ 2.0 (pass)	25 = 100%	17 = 100 %

Table 5(A) shows that nine girls out of eleven in the urban school passed from grade 1 to grade 2 while 13 out of 16 boys passed. This put the girls at 81.8% pass rate while boys had 81.25%. Table 5(B) shows that 100% of girls and a 100% of boys passed to grade 2 in the rural school. More girls, however, had a passing grade superior to 5 out of 10 (76.47% versus 64% for boys).

Table 6 (A & B): Impact on urban versus rural retention (passing from grade 2 to grade 3)

A: Rural school: Pass rate from grade 2 to grade 3			B: Urban school: Pass rate from grade2 to grade3		
N= 23	Boys = 14	Girls = 9	N= 29	Boys = 17	Girls = 12
Av. grade/10	5.23	6.3	Av. Grade/10	5.24	4.47
≥ 5.0	7 = 50%	7 = 77%	≥ 5.0	10 = 58.82%	3 = 25%
≥ 2 (pass)	13 = 92.8%	9 = 100%	≥ 2 (pass)	16 = 94%	11 = 91.66%

Table 6(A) shows that 100% of girls in the rural school passed to grade 3 while 92.8% of boys passed. It also shows that 77% of girls had a passing grade superior to 5 out of 10 while only 50% of boys had such a grade. In the urban school (Table 6B) only one girl and one boy were repeating grade 2 although only 25% of girls had a passing grade superior to 5 out of 10.

Tables 4, 5(A & B) and 6(A & B) imply that not only did the quality of instruction improve in the classrooms since both girls and boys exhibited more participation, higher passing grades and an almost non-existent repeater rate but also and, above all, girls' participation seemed to be higher than boys in the classroom. As a result, bilingual schools were contributing to girls' attendance and retention in school especially with a repeater rate almost non-existent. The government's policy objectives of seeking to increase "the rate of school attendance from 38 to 57% in rural areas and from 41.7% in 2002 to 60% (nationally) by the year 2015" and the "girls' access to school by raising the rate of school attendance to 52 % in 2015 from 28.9 % in 2002, were, therefore, being reached as supported by the trends in the above tables.

Implications for learners outside of the classroom

Female Parents' Involvement Versus Expected Social "Norms"

This study indicated that female parents were very active and interested in the schooling of their children. Before arriving into the study field, we did not expect to have access to female parents for them to be our participants. As a result, we anticipated to interview fathers. This judgment was based on the premises that, in the context of this

study, male parents were de facto representatives of their respective families in public. Much to our satisfaction, seven out of ten parents who responded to our invitations were women. Two of the three male parents volunteered to be interviewees because they were teachers in the schools each of whom had a child in the first grade. The third male parent was one first grader's uncle who happened to be her guardian because both her biological parents migrated to Cote d'Ivoire and left her to attend school in Niger.

In addition, all parents who returned their children's grade books were exclusively women. These parents had even developed rapport with the teachers who were very well acquainted with them and spoke to them frequently about their children's schooling. Moreover, in teaching materials, female parents were featured as having the leading role regarding their children's education. I mentioned earlier that in an oral French lesson by TP-3, the dialogue centered on a mother who knocked at the door to inform the teacher that her son was absent because he was sick. These trends were certainly not typically endogenous, but that the mother, instead of the father, was the sole parent who consulted with the teachers about her child's schooling might further encourage children, in particular girls, to see school as worthwhile and relevant, thus improving their motivation, self-confidence and attendance.

Most importantly, the tendency to enable female parents to be at the fore front of their children's schooling, were positive changes that could help fight negative stereotypes against females in the society. In essence these changes helped portray women not as caring for household chores only but also as agents of change, actively pushing for the betterment of their children's education. That six of the seven participating female parents were uneducated or partially educated housewives, was an indication of the break-up of old societal norms defining mothers as witnessing rather than actively participating in their children's learning. Only the seventh, a nurse, had twelve years of schooling.

This parental involvement in their children's education also contributed to bringing in a new social order in Niger society. Henderson & Berla (1995) claimed that parental involvement of this nature "is pivotal to children's learning" in the US and was the best predictor of student success at school, not income or social status. They added that "[w]hen parents are involved, students achieve better, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's education level".

In addition, the parental involvement helped bridge the gap between school and the local environment. Parents had an opportunity to see the western school not as an island with a completely different lifestyle that threatened the existence of the local culture¹ (Wynd, 1999) but, as most parents reported, as part of the local environment which, rather than threatening the culture, revitalized and enriched it. Some female parents even dared to threaten to transfer their other children who were in the French monolingual schools to

¹ Even the representative of the French agency in charge of promoting education in Niger recognized that school [monolingual French school as it has been since independence in 1960] rendered parents hopeless because of its lack of *contextualization* [taking into account the socio-cultural context of the pupils] and flexibility.

bilingual schools as was the case with this woman who said:

May God protect [my daughter from the eyes of the envious]! Right after I registered her in Hausa school, I realized that she became more alert, open-minded and smarter than her older sister that has been attending the other school [pointing at a non-Hausa-French school about 200 yards away]. Even when they are practicing writing at home, it is clear the little sister who is attending Hausa school is better. Sometimes she has to teach her sister some things, such as math or writing. I am very proud of her. Actually this morning I made a decision that I will transfer her older sister here (Chekaraou, 2009, p. 174).

This statement reflected the view of almost all parent participants. Many of them expressed pride in their children for attending these schools that valued their language, culture and life activities.

Breaking Gender Stereotypes

Female parents' agency regarding their children's schooling logically contributed also to breaking gender stereotypes because it enabled children not to grow up believing that the only domain reserved to women was the kitchen and the chores at home. In addition, the teachers' gender neutrality in assigning tasks in the classroom contributed strongly to self-confidence and self-esteem in girls. Elsewhere in Africa, teachers were reported to make comments that put down girls in the classroom (Odaga & Heneveld, 1995). In the bilingual Hausa-French schools, on the contrary, no case of a teacher putting down a girl was recorded during this study. Instead, teachers treated girls and encouraged them to participate in classroom activities as well as boys. That our observation data (Tables 4, 5 (A & B), 6 (A & B) above) showed a tendency for girls to participate more frequently in teacher-student interaction constituted another avenue for doing away with gender stereotypes against girls. TP-3 confided to me that girls were more active in the classroom and had better grades than boys though he did not know the reason.

Conclusion

Although focused on four teachers in only two Hausa-French bilingual schools, this case study pointed to positive pedagogical gains for teachers and students both inside and outside of the classroom. With teaching based on the Active Method, the bilingual classroom became more democratic for students to be able to express themselves and interact properly with their teachers who also remained guides rather than "dictators". Consequently, students saw their learning experience improve with girls participating in the classroom as well as or even more often than boys. Results also included parental involvement, female parents' agency and contribution to fading out negative stereotypes

against girls in school. At the governmental level, these modest results also suggested that bilingual schools contributed to providing equal access to schooling and knowledge through an equitable treatment of girls in the classroom and in the learning process. In so doing, bilingual schools contributed to retaining children (especially girls) in school by reducing the repeater rate to being almost non-existent. It is our hope that more studies focus on education policy implementation at the classroom level especially that such lower ranking policy stakeholders as teachers, students and parents tend to be overlooked by researchers.

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